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Frederick Law Olmsted, to the President of the Commission during the Peninsular Campaign, and of extracts from the private letters of another gentleman and six ladies who were in the service of the Commission during the same period. These letters cover about two months, from the evacuation of Yorktown by the Rebel forces to the withdrawal of our army stores from White-House, and were written without any thought of publication. They have been selected and arranged for the press, under the authority of the Commission, by one of the managers of the "Woman's Central Army Relief Association of New York." As we might naturally expect, the extracts from Mr. Olmsted's communications fill the greater part of the volume, — the other extracts being used only as connecting links to bind the whole into a consecutive narrative. They tell a simple and deeply interesting story of modest and faithful services in diminishing the sufferings of the sick, wounded, and dying soldiers in that memorable campaign, and show in the most conclusive manner how admirably the operations of this noble charity have been conducted. From the necessities of the case, the individual writer is constantly brought forward as a prominent actor in the scenes described; but, as has been well remarked, there is none of that parade of self-devotion and self-sacrifice which is too often seen in those who are engaged in charitable labors. Each of the writers seems to have felt that he or she was sufficiently rewarded for every weary hour of day or night toil by the consciousness that thus many lives were saved, and many dying pillows made easier.

11. — *The Amber Gods, and Other Stories.* By HARRIET ELIZABETH PRESCOTT. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1863. 16mo. pp. 432.

THE seven stories comprised in this volume have already been published in the pages of the "Atlantic Monthly," where they attracted much notice; but in this reprint they are likely to find many new readers, and in their collected form they demand a somewhat more searching criticism than they received when first published. The early productions of a writer, who has at once achieved so large a popularity as Miss Prescott has already won, can never be matters of indifference to any one who is interested in the growth of American literature, and it is well to consider what are their real merits and defects, and what is the promise which they reveal. In analyzing the impressions derived from a careful reading of Miss Prescott's stories, we suppose that it will be generally admitted that her popularity is due in the first place to the united strength and brilliancy of her descriptions. In

each of her stories there are many passages of gorgeous magnificence, of intense interest, or of startling power, and there is scarcely one in which there is not abundant evidence that she has an imagination of extraordinary richness and strength in everything relating to this part of her art, however poor it may be in any other respect. In the second place, her popularity, we think, is largely owing to her skill in investing her characters with a personal interest, and compelling the reader to follow their careers to the end, even though the characters are in themselves utterly despicable. These two traits — an ability to describe scenes and personages with clearness and force, and the power of enchainning the reader's attention through a long narrative — are among the most important qualifications of a novelist or the story-writer; and both of them our author possesses in large measure.

In respect to the conception and evolution of her plots, she can lay claim to no such high excellence. Not one of her plots is, in any just sense of the term, original; and neither the variations from the familiar stories or fables, nor the additions to them, are of sufficient importance to demand notice. Other writers have made use of the same materials for a similar purpose, and we refer to Miss Prescott's deficiency in this particular mainly because it is a singular circumstance, that one whose imagination is so rich on the descriptive side should have so little creative power in forming the ground-plan of her stories. This defect, however, is one that we should expect to find in a young writer; and, from the ability which Miss Prescott exhibits in other respects, we may confidently anticipate her entire triumph over it.

In one other particular her stories are open to criticism: a low, murky atmosphere too often hangs over them; and almost without exception they have a morbid and unhealthful tone. In four of the seven stories now before us, the dominant passion in the breast of one or more of the chief characters is illicit love; and in each of these four stories, the whole or the greater part of the interest is made to depend on the history of this passion. That such a representation of the relation which a married man or a married woman holds to any one of his or her friends is a true picture of married life, no one will affirm; and therefore, to put our objection in its lowest form, a writer who makes the interest of her love-stories, with a single exception, depend on the development of an unlawful affection, commits a grave artistic fault. Illicit love in ordinary life is the exception, not the rule; and it is certainly making rather an extravagant use of the exceptional for a writer to employ it in four cases out of five in a single collection of miscellaneous stories. But it is a still more fatal objection to the too frequent use of such machinery, that the constant contemplation of a

diseased side of human nature can scarcely fail to produce an unhealthy state of mind, and thus to exert a dangerous influence. A writer, whose stories are so eagerly read, and so often discussed in society as are those of Miss Prescott, ought not to be unmindful of the influence which she may exert on the young; for it is among the young for the most part that her readers must be found. The most pleasing, but not the most elaborate of her stories, — “Knitting Sale-Socks,” — is unexceptionable in tone, and it is simply because this is so that the story is more pleasing than those on which the writer has bestowed greater labor. So too, though the moral tone of “In a Cellar” is not of the highest, every one must prefer it to “Desert Sands,” or to “Midsummer and May,” the longest tale in the volume.

From what has already been said, it will readily be inferred that we think very highly of Miss Prescott's ability. Her stories are too full of promise not to give abundant assurance of her increasing excellence as a writer. She already possesses too many elements of power not to improve with experience, and she has done wisely in giving some respite to her pen, instead of following up her early successes with a flood of new productions, as a person of less discretion might have done. She has only to avoid a few faults, to breathe a healthier tone into her writings, and to cultivate her own capacity of original thought, in order to assume a foremost place in this department of letters.

12. — *Philip van Artevelde. A Dramatic Romance. In Two Parts.*
By HENRY TAYLOR. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1863. 24mo.
pp. 456. (Blue and Gold.)

THIS celebrated poem was reprinted in this country shortly after its first appearance in England; but the American edition has long been out of print, and the republication of the work in a form so convenient and beautiful will be welcomed, therefore, by all who enjoy the higher kinds of poetry. Throughout it bears the marks of a strong and healthy mind; and few persons, we are inclined to think, will refuse their assent to the judgment which pronounces it the finest production of its class published in England during the last thirty years. The subject is a noble one; and Mr. Taylor's treatment of it is fully equal to every just demand which an exacting criticism can make on him. As an historical poem, it not only preserves with scrupulous fidelity the broad outline of facts on which it is based, but also gathers up with not less care many of the curious details recorded by Froissart; and when the author gives play to his imagination, he is always careful not